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Watterson, Gene L. (1969)

Pastors of First Baptist Shelby

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Newspaper Clipping - Nov 14, 1989 - Gene Watterson

Shelby Star Staff

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Gene Watterson vying for Baptist presidency

Staff, wire reports

GREENSBORO — The Rev. Gene Watterson of Shelby was among the slate of candidates being considered this morning for president of the N.C. Baptist State Convention.

The membership was to vote on that and other issues today at the annual convention.

Dr. Watterson, pastor of Shelby's First Baptist Church and convention first vice president for two years, is backed by moderates within the denomination.

On Monday, the outgoing president, the Rev. E. Leon Smith, said division among moderates and conservatives within the convention is interfering with the denomination's religious mission.

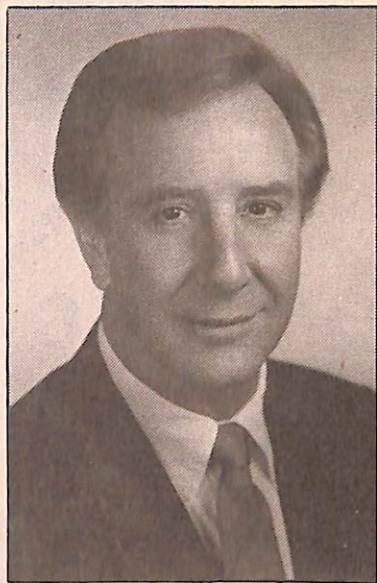
"It is no news to any of us that we as a denomination do not have that wonderful sense of unity that we need to face to-

day's world," Smith said during the opening of the group's annual meeting. "As long as we always think it is the other person committing the infractions and violating our religious space, we will never perceive our own failures."

Old prejudices and stereotypical thinking among Southern Baptists have served only to isolate the denomination from others, Smith said.

Nearly 4,500 messengers from churches across the state will meet through Wednesday to elect new officers and vote on a \$29.3-million budget.

Elections for the offices of president and vice president are scheduled to be held today. Two conservative candidates and Watterson are expected to vie to succeed Smith, who is ending his second one-year term as president of the state organization. He is not eligible to run



Dr. Gene Watterson hopes to be elected president of the N.C. Baptist State Convention.

again.

Moderates have been able to maintain control of the state convention, despite conservative challenges.

The decade-long division be-

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tween moderate and conservative factions has hurt the convention's efforts to reach others, as well as taking its toll within the 1.1-million-member state group, Smith said.

Smith called for Baptists of both groups to overcome the division by looking to Jesus and by examining their own actions. The moderate president also noted that the conservatively controlled national denomination has not supported women as pastors. That stance, Smith said, alienates younger members and particularly women.

"They will not stay in a denomination that seems bent on turning back the clocks on a

reasonable and intelligent approach to the scriptures or a holistic understanding of the Gospel," he said.

"A system of bias and exclusion that denigrates women by either principle or language has nothing in common with the liberating spirit of Jesus," he said.

Moderates apparently are united behind Watterson, who has been first vice president of the convention for two years.

The conservatives, however, are divided behind two possible candidates, one of whom is from Wilmington.

The Rev. Eugene Ridley, the pastor of the 1,500-member Long Leaf Baptist Church, has been supported by one group of traditional conservatives. Another group, the Conservative Carolina Baptists, has backed the Rev. Billy Cline of Asheville.